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Teaching Web 2.0 applications in the planning and development of information literacy programs: reaching out to librarians and information professionals

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Abstract

This paper shall cover a discussion of the efforts exerted by the author to teach Web 2.0 applications in the planning and development of Information Literacy programs and strategies for different types of libraries and learning centers. It focuses on the vital role played by librarians and information professionals in coming up with initiatives to introduce and spearhead the use of Web 2.0 tools in the development and enhancement of information literacy teaching aimed at educating users of information. After participating in the various trainings, seminars and workshops covering topics on Web 2.0 applications and information literacy, the author embarked on various efforts to echo and share new approaches and strategies learned with other librarians and library and information science students. By serving as Resource speaker and workshop facilitator, the author was able to impart to a number of participants new knowledge and strategies in using Web 2.0 tools Information Literacy teaching. The first public lecture delivered on the topic was held at the School of Library and Information Studies, University of the Philippines (UP-SLIS), the premiere school for library and information science with students, members of the faculty and librarians for audience and participants. Other opportunities to teach included invitations for activities, conferences and seminar-workshops that were sponsored by a professional librarians' association. Invitations also came from alumni associations.

In these efforts to teach, the author included in the presentation an introduction to different Web 2.0 tools which can be applied in the development of IL programs, including the use of blogs and social networking sites to reach out to users. Emphasis was also given to the convenience offered by wikis and RSS feeds in providing updated information. File sharing sites were also discussed and its various uses in providing end users of information easy access to what used to be totally untapped and undiscovered sources of information. And more than just teaching about the technology, the author presented Web 2.0 as tools that can be utilized by anyone regardless of age, race, orientation, educational attainment and socioeconomic status. Emphasis is given on the importance of critical thinking and being a lifelong learner, both essential aspects relating to information literacy.

Keywords: Web 2.0, Information Literacy, Librarians

Introduction

After participating in a number of seminars and workshops mainly on the topics of information literacy and Web 2.0, it is deemed necessary to share with other librarians new knowledge and strategies in introducing Information Literacy as more than just doing library orientations and instructions given at some point during the semester. The primary objective is to add new methods to the old bag of tricks for librarians in educating users in their use of available and accessible information sources in the library. With this in mind, what could be more appropriate than using as leverage what seems to be the most ubiquitous and most appealing medium, which is online information? The internet is where the students and members of the faculty head straight-away to search for specific information, for reasons both academic and personal. Librarians can continue to insist and slog on presenting some other sources in other formats but the truth remains that the internet is the preferred first line of attack in looking for the needed information. Only when this fails to provide a satisfactory answer will the searcher (might) start considering other options, including seeking for the assistance from the librarian.

When library users are faced with the dilemma of continuing to search albeit inefficiently the web, the librarian should recognize this as a perfect opportunity to introduce the various concepts relating to information literacy and presenting the edge and benefits they offer as one embarks on any research pursuit. It is a painfully slow process and would not guarantee an instantaneous positive outcome, but it should, at the very least, provide a good jumpstart.

Defining Information literacy

There are a number of definitions which are widely accepted in discussing and illustrating information literacy. CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) defined it as *"knowing when and why you need information, knowing where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner."* (CILIP, 2004). The Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL) provides for the Seven Pillars model that illustrates further the requisite skills to be considered information literate, these are:

- Recognizing the need for information
- Distinguishing sources and access
- Constructing search strategies
- Locating and accessing
- Comparing and evaluating
- Organizing, applying and communicating
- Synthesizing and adding new knowledge

Eisenberg and Berkowitz's Big 6 model is a widely-known information technology literacy model and curriculum and is being implemented in many schools, from preschool to higher education. It provides for the 6 stages of an information problem solving strategy. These stages are:

- Task definition
- Information seeking strategies
- Location and access
- Use of Information
- Synthesis
- Evaluation

Common to all of these models and definitions is the recognition of the role played by the library as the most important venue for accessing information and eventual learning. But what exactly is the role of libraries and librarians in this whole new ballgame of providing Information Literacy teachings? Are we up to the challenge posed by Google as the one click source of answers to all imaginable questions? Are current users accessing the information they are supposed to access? Are they able to make use of this information which they highlight... and copy and paste? This actually leads to another series of questions with regards to determining information needs, critical thinking and making use of information. What about identification of authoritative sources, of acknowledging sources of ideas that are not one's own and thus need to be properly cited?

Educating the Net generation

Library and information professionals should be able to recognize additional higher education concerns that include demographics, justification for increased funding, changing user expectations, teaching methods and strategies, life-long learning and most importantly having to deal with the Net generation. It no longer holds true that the academic library is the sole destination and authority when working on assignments and research among students. Students and scholars are now presented with numerous options and can easily carve their own pathways to discovering new things, and hopefully learning. These are the students belonging to Net generation who prefer single search boxes like Google and Amazon. They find searching the databases too cumbersome and the VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) too complicated. This is the generation that has forgotten Boolean logic or yet to appreciate the help of the reference librarian when doing library research. This generation has never known life without the Internet and thrives on collaboration, social networking and peer to peer production of contents (Godwin, 2007). Internet is their life sustaining oxygen. It is quite hard to imagine not being connected for the major part of the day and much of their activities are centered in being part of a network in active discussions.

These Net generation users and learners are given widespread access to technology. They are able to navigate the Internet and use an impressive array of IT devices and are quite comfortable using them without the aid of a manual. This does not however, automatically translate into having a deep understanding of how these technologies actually work. They may have been classified as "tech savvies" able to create, connect and collaborate but this does not guarantee being able to access, evaluate and use information appropriately and efficiently. This is where critical thinking and information technology skills spell the difference. There had never been a more opportune time for

libraries and librarians to make their presence felt and their authorities asserted than being in the midst of all this chaos brought about by the openness and read/write platforms provided by Web 2.0.

Web 2.0 tools and information literacy teachings

Education has many concerns which in the last few years have expanded to include technological change, population change, competition, branding, different student expectations, funding, learning and teaching methods, innovation and quite significantly, having to deal with what is being regarded as the Web generation. This is the generation that is totally dependent on single search boxes like Google and amazon.com which provide instant gratification when making searches, and they are oblivious to the work of the librarian or the power of knowing how to conduct a Boolean search.

Web 2.0 is best viewed as a useful collective name to cover a number of services and tools which use the Web as platform and which encourage the creation of communities and collaborative participation (O'Reilly, 2005). This should be regarded as a chance to engage the net generation. It suggests that librarians should have a firm grasp of understanding what the technology allows, learning new skills and embracing new ways of working. The tools of Web 2.0 create and encourage conversations about almost anything and this should then be taken as an opportunity to join in and blend with the Net Generation. Be there... where they are! A new level of discourse is taking place online. Librarians should find ways to participate and libraries should provide a venue to "talk" and let conversations happen!

It should be made part of a librarian's job description to provide for IL teaching aside from the customary and "one shot" library orientations and instructions. They should be able to utilize various sources and develop strategies and techniques, including the many possibilities offered by Web 2.0 tools specifically in the design and development of programs for information literacy.

Paying it forward

Participating in the Salzburg Seminar (Session 439) on the "New Information Networks: challenges and opportunities for business, government and media" gave me the opportunity to be immersed in a thorough discussion of the new information networks, which is now most fittingly termed as Web 2.0 or the "read and write web" (which is the simplest way to describe the second generation Internet). In this Seminar, various topics were covered by faculty members composed of academicians and practitioners in the fields of media, education and information. As if fate would have it, another opportunity to participate in another program came. This time, it was a four weeks workshop on Information Literacy and Technology. The Workshop encompassed comprehensive and detailed modules on learning the basics of information literacy program planning for libraries and it focused on the role of librarians and information professionals. The Workshop was sponsored by the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) and was held at the Victoria University Library in Wellington, New Zealand. There were twelve participants in the program, all coming from developing countries. One of the modules of this program focused on "Web 2.0 for libraries" and how Web 2.0 tools can be utilized in support of information literacy teachings. These two programs became the stimulus that brought forth the idea of teaching librarians about the variety of Web 2.0 tools and how these can be applied in planning and developing information literacy programs in libraries.

At the University of the Philippines, library staff who were given the opportunity to participate in continuing education programs are expected to share and echo new knowledge gained. This sharing may take the form of presenting a summarized report or writing and publishing a paper. Others opt to echo in a more formal set up, i.e. as presenter in a conference or seminar-workshop. Lesson planning for each presentation made is an exercise in the thorough analysis of information literacy as a concept that should be presented dependent on the composition of the audience and taking into account their previous knowledge (or lack of it) of the topic.

Upon returning from the four weeks training on Information Literacy I immediately requested for a slot in the ongoing series of public lectures held at the School of Library and Information Studies (SLIS). This first public lecture was held on February 22 with students and college librarians in attendance. This was the first opportunity to present a report on the IFLA ALP Workshop on Information Literacy and Technology. Integrated in this report is a brief reference to a program I participated in earlier that year, the Salzburg Seminar Session 439 on the "New Information Networks". For this Public Lecture, I was only able to present an overview of the coverage of the whole training course. I should say that this was a good jumpstart because it actually paved the way for more opportunities to teach librarians about information literacy and Web 2.0 applications.

After this presentation I received a number of invitations to conduct lectures and presentations on the topic Web 2.0 and Information Literacy Program Planning. As part of the concrete efforts to teach librarians, I gave lectures and served as facilitator in seminar-workshops on the topic of applying the use of Web 2.0 tools in the design and development of IL teachings. I had for my audience, librarians and information professionals that hail from different sectors with sundry and diverse backgrounds and orientations. These public lectures and seminar-workshops became the apposite venues for presenting and discussing the many facets of information literacy and the justifications as to why it should take a chunk of the librarians' duties and responsibilities.

For each of these presentations an Outline was developed so as to facilitate effective teaching and knowledge sharing. This outline usually contains the following items:

- Learning objectives
- Performance outcomes
- Definition of concepts and related topics
- Examples and suggested strategies and approaches
- Feedback and Evaluation

These modules for the lectures and workshops include the following:

Information Literacy Power Packages

The contents of the presentations are focused mainly on the typical modules of Information Literacy teaching that meet the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) competency standards.

The ACRL Competency Standard

Standard 1- The information literate student determines the nature and extent of the information needed

Standard 2 - The information literate student accesses needed information effectively and efficiently

Standard 3 - The information literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system.

Standard 4 - The information literate student, individually or as a member of a group, uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose

Standard 5 - The information literate student understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally

Information Literacy teaching corresponds to performance indicators of each standard. There is much difficulty discussing these strategies since the very concept of information literacy is in reality a recent addition to the mounting concerns of librarians involved in library user education. There is no need for concrete reports and statistical data to provide evidence that information literacy is yet to penetrate the consciousness of librarians in the country. Libraries are yet to include in their services, Information Literacy strategies to teach students.

The presentation is intended for librarians who take charge of providing for pedagogical approaches to user education and design and development of information literacy programs. These are the fundamental topics that serve as the outline of courses in information literacy teaching and these include:

- Choosing and deciding on a research topic
- Identification of different types of information sources
- Use of online catalog and tutorials on the use of OPAC
- How to search databases to find related literature
- Search strategies using Boolean Logic
- Acknowledgement and Proper citation of sources
- Search engines
- Evaluating sources of information
- Plagiarism and intellectual dishonesty

The above topics are just a few of the numerous and diverse information literacy approaches that can be considered when working on an IL agenda in an academic library. For the discussion of each of these topics, it is made clear that it is not about putting pressure on the part of the librarian to have the

requisite information literacy expertise. Emphasis is on making them understand and recognize the added value that (fundamentally 2.0) online resources can bring into the concretization of the teachings that will provide the framework for a successful information literacy program. Teaching librarians about these topics takes into account the level of information literacy awareness and knowledge among librarians; it is imperative that only the most common topics of concern be covered in the presentations. The illustrations given are not necessarily designed and developed locally. When there is no identifiable locally designed and developed program to illustrate the teaching strategy, then examples taken from programs developed by foreign institutions are presented.

The Role of Librarians in Borderless Learning

The Vibal Foundation, the non-profit philanthropic arm of Vibal Publishing House, Inc., sponsored a series of Seminar-Workshops intended for teacher librarians on the theme "Borderless Learning". This is part of the ongoing efforts to promote the use of web based sources in schools. This Seminar-Workshop is designed for teacher-librarians and media specialists assigned in elementary and secondary (K-12) level libraries. My experience in dealing with teachers as participants can be described as partly surprising and disappointing. The majority of the participants in these Workshops have limited (and sometimes zero) exposure to online resource, much less with specific Web 2.0 tools. It was during these workshops that I felt most deprived and disadvantaged. The sad state of the educational system in the country accounts mostly for this depravity. There were even sessions that actually started with assisting participants in creating an e-mail account. This prompted an on-the-spot revision of the prepared Outline since most of these Web 2.0 tools require an e-mail account to connect and access.

This course for teacher librarians contains the following items:

- Information sources in school library media centers (Print and Electronic)
- The Internet as a source
- Google and Googling
- Social Networking: Teachers and Pupils Meeting Outside the Classroom
- The Use of Wikis, Blogs and RSS to Reach Out and Assist Students in their Use of the Library Media Center

Facilitating these workshops proved to be a real challenge. Not only that I had to deal with having to give a protracted introduction of the topic of information literacy, I also had to be truly mindful that even though I have teachers and school administrators for participants, they are not necessarily well versed and completely knowledgeable of the workings of online information access and use.

Web 2.0 tools in teaching information literacy

The various Web 2.0 tools that can be considered as means for teaching information literacy may take the forms of blogs, photo-sharing and video-sharing, tagging and bookmarking sites as well as social networks. My presentations would ordinarily start with identifying and describing these different tools, then proceed to giving concrete illustrations of use by different academic institutions, specifically in their information literacy teaching programs. Some of these applications include:

Blogs

- Aid the students develop writing skills, encourage creation of communities and reflections
- Can be used in teaching with student content being collected into the teachers' aggregators
- Keeping a blog as a way of recording progress and managing time
- Can be used to build up evidence and gather opinions from peers or instructors

Wikis

- A good starting point for research
- Encourage group work and peer review
- A good way to introduce how easy it is to be posting information on the web

Social networking sites

- Venues for students to explore collaborative research endeavors
- Can be used to organize and present class content
- Tagging can become part of critical thinking, creating links which involve evaluation, categorizing and formulating keywords

Web 2.0 manifestations in information literacy teachings

These efforts to include Web 2.0 tools in teaching librarians to design and develop Information Literacy programs have yet to be acknowledged as having a significant impact. The reach is not that extensive yet, considering that only a handful of librarians were able to participate and complete the courses given. Their number cannot be considered to have a noteworthy aggregate. Nevertheless, I want to believe that the seed of idea has been planted. It just needs to be nurtured and watched over. Follow up presentations are being planned and a more structured module is being designed.

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